

Winter Crops that Will Amend your Soil and Save You Time

By **Kenny Murakami and Sophie Braccini**

We are blessed by a climate that permits winter vegetable gardening. It is not uncommon to be able to supply the table with salad from the garden all winter long. Broccoli, kale and many other edible species also do quite well. However, some gardeners would rather give their kitchen garden a rest during the cool months, or even better, plant crops that will fertilize and amend it.

This technique is known as "green manuring."

Green manuring is the planting of crops intended to be cut down and turned in the soil at a later date. There are two types of green manures: legumes and non-legumes. Legumes, such as clover, beans, peas, vetch, alfalfa, help fix nitrogen from the air, making it available for organic matter breaking up heavy soils. Usually, people

plant green manures as a winter cover crop, but you can plant them year round. October is an especially good month for planting the legumes, and it is your best opportunity for peas. You can plant the other plants into November, and a December sowing will still give you some results.

A common winter cover crop consists of a grass and a legume such as winter ryegrass and purple vetch. The ryegrass has 2' roots which help bring nutrients up from deep in the soil, and as an additional local benefit, it grows well even in heavy clays. It helps open up the soil (after the rye is cut down and turned under, those 2" deep roots remain, decomposing and creating vertical, compost filled, cracks in the soil). The vetch will fix nitrogen in the soil and increase its fertility. Most legumes have a symbiotic relationship with a bacterium that lives on their roots and

develops the nodules that will fix the air's nitrogen in a way the plant can use. So leave the roots in the soil.

Generally, you want to cut down green manures when they are beginning to bloom but before they mature and set seed. The plants are more succulent, less fibrous and break down faster in the soil. You can chop up the green manure with a spade or rotary mower, or turn it under with tiller. If you choose fava beans and peas you can eat

the edible part before the plant is used for green manuring. The plant might be a little tougher, so you might have to shred it before you work it in your soil.

Planting requirements:

Fava Beans: sew to a rate of 3 to 5 pounds for 1000 square foot, Annual Rye grass: 1 to 2 pounds for 1000 square foot, Purple Vetch: 1 to 3 pounds for 1000 square foot and Peas: 2 to 4 pounds for 1000 square foot.



Kenny Murakami, Moraga Garden Center holding Fava Beans



Green manure Alfalfa

Lush Lawns, Pest-Free Homes . . . But At What Cost?

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Parents for a Safer Environment founder Susan JunFish, MPH, smiles as children play at Moraga Commons. Her work has helped make parks and schools safer for children

Although PfSE has helped facilitate changes in the Moraga parks and school district, JunFish says continued spraying around the shopping malls, apartment buildings and in single-family homes pose potential hazards.

"Most people are not aware how pesticides, especially when they are tracked indoors, could stay active for months inside a home and expose children," she said.

Currently, the U.S. Environ-

mental Protection Agency relies on those who apply pesticides, including landowners, to decide whether or not they want to take the risk of using toxic pesticides. It is illegal for any pest control operators (such as True Green Chem Lawn, Terminex, Clark, etc.) to tell residents that pesticides are safe or non-toxic.

Additionally, JunFish says risk assessments that were used in the past to approve pesticides and many other chemicals were based

on 30-year-old healthy white males.

"Now even the EPA is beginning to accept almost 10 years of accumulating research showing children are hundreds of times more susceptible to certain pesticides than adults," she said. "In proportion to their size, children breathe the drink and eat more than adults and do not have the full set of liver enzymes that could help break down some toxins and, additionally, are more susceptible to pesticide exposure because they have more hand-to-mouth habits and play low to the ground."

Approximately one-third of the total pounds of pesticides used in California in any given year are known to be particularly toxic to humans, whether as immediate (acute) poisons, chronic toxins or both.

Every three years, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control biomonitors several thousand people randomly for numerous toxins, including pesticides. They are finding an increasing amount of pyrethroids – the number one pes-

ticide family of choice currently used by pest control operators for insect control – in those tested.

"Like DDT was banned in the 1970s, pyrethroids will likely also be banned or strictly limited in use in the future," said JunFish. "If we don't curb our use of unnecessary chemicals of convenience, we will continue to see multitudes of chronic illnesses in ourselves, in pets, and in wildlife as a result."

So what can you do? PfSE suggests choosing least-toxic alternatives to get rid of pests, and limit fertilizer usage or change to organic fertilizers that are slow releasing.

For more information about Parents for a Safer Environment and information and links for solutions to abating or getting rid of almost any pest among other topics, visit www.pfse.net. PfSE is seeking a part-time staff person for research and advocacy work.

Moraga Men Read Books Too

Submitted by **Dean Mayer**

Skinny Dip; By Carl Hiaasen; Alfred A. Knopf, publisher, 2004, 355 pages

Lamorinda parents may be more familiar with Carl Hiaasen for his young readers' book, Hoot, than for his novels aimed at adults. But Hiaasen, a Florida-born author and Miami Herald journalist, has written some 10 novels for those beyond school age, including Skinny Dip, a piece of crisply written, satirical crime fiction filled with dark humor.

Our "Moraga Men Read Books Too" book group (see how you can join below) found Skinny Dip to be light, fun summertime reading that, of course, you can enjoy any time of the year. Call it Elmore Leonard meets Dave Barry, which makes for an entertaining blend that's just right for lazy Sundays, airplane flights or a few days at the pool.

Skinny Dip opens with incompetent marine scientist Chaz Perrone pushing his beautiful, heiress wife Joey Perrone overboard from a luxury cruise ship on the Atlantic, miles from Key West. Chaz isn't out for his wife's fortune. Rather, he fears Joey has discovered

the profitable pollution scam he's running on behalf of a ruthless agribusiness tycoon who wants to continue illegally dumping fertilizer into the endangered Everglades.

Unfortunately for Chaz, Joey, a former swimming champ, doesn't drown. She makes her way back to shore thanks to a wayward bale of Jamaican marijuana (how Florida can you get?) and Mick Stranahan, a moody, loner ex-cop who also has struck out in the marriage department. Then Joey (with Mick's help) launches a devious plot of revenge aimed at driving Chaz crazy and making him pay for his misdeeds.

Though Joey and Mick could be a little better developed as characters, their counter-plotting against the increasingly paranoid Chaz is compelling. Hiaasen also introduces several other fascinating characters, including a misplaced Norwegian police investigator and a rough but occasionally sympathetic henchman for the agribusiness tycoon. Scenes of the henchman's tender visits with an old woman in a nursing home are well-crafted.

Hiaasen is at his best when he describes the tragic destruction of the Everglades due mostly to greed and corruption by developers and puppet politicians lusting after a buck through the decades. It's easy to see why Hiaasen is regarded by many as an important environmental voice striving to save his beloved Florida from continued plundering.

Is Skinny Dip classic literature? No, but most of you should find it an enjoyable, satiric romp injected with mystery, over-the-top characters, make-you-laugh situations, and a few cynical truths about people and society.

"Moraga Men Read Books Too" meets monthly, usually on Monday night at Pennini's over pizza and a beverage. We're a small book group and welcome new members. We talk about the books, but we're not intense. We laugh about things and check out the sports on Pennini's big screen TV. To learn more or join us, please email dmayer@clifbar.com or call Dean at 247-0836.

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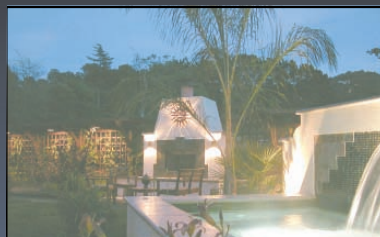
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